

RESPA so long as they give more protection to consumers and/or competition.

(c) Any person may request the Secretary to determine whether an inconsistency exists by submitting to the address indicated in § 3500.3, a copy of the State law in question, any other law or judicial or administrative opinion that implements, interprets or applies the relevant provision, and an explanation of the possible inconsistency. A determination by the Secretary that an inconsistency with State law exists will be made by publication of a notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER. "Law" as used in this section includes regulations and any enactment which has the force and effect of law and is issued by a State or any political subdivision of a State.

(d) A specific preemption of conflicting State laws regarding notices and disclosures of mortgage servicing transfers is set forth in § 3500.21(h).

[61 FR 13233, Mar. 26, 1996, as amended at 61 FR 58476, Nov. 15, 1996]

§ 3500.14 Prohibition against kickbacks and unearned fees.

(a) *Section 8 violation.* Any violation of this section is a violation of section 8 of RESPA (12 U.S.C. 2607) and is subject to enforcement as such under § 3500.19.

(b) *No referral fees.* No person shall give and no person shall accept any fee, kickback or other thing of value pursuant to any agreement or understanding, oral or otherwise, that business incident to or part of a settlement service involving a federally related mortgage loan shall be referred to any person. Any referral of a settlement service is not a compensable service, except as set forth in § 3500.14(g)(1). A company may not pay any other company or the employees of any other company for the referral of settlement service business.

(c) *No split of charges except for actual services performed.* No person shall give and no person shall accept any portion, split, or percentage of any charge made or received for the rendering of a settlement service in connection with a transaction involving a federally related mortgage loan other than for services actually performed. A charge

by a person for which no or nominal services are performed or for which duplicative fees are charged is an unearned fee and violates this section. The source of the payment does not determine whether or not a service is compensable. Nor may the prohibitions of this part be avoided by creating an arrangement wherein the purchaser of services splits the fee.

(d) *Thing of value.* This term is broadly defined in section 3(2) of RESPA (12 U.S.C. 2602(2)). It includes, without limitation, monies, things, discounts, salaries, commissions, fees, duplicate payments of a charge, stock, dividends, distributions of partnership profits, franchise royalties, credits representing monies that may be paid at a future date, the opportunity to participate in a money-making program, retained or increased earnings, increased equity in a parent or subsidiary entity, special bank deposits or accounts, special or unusual banking terms, services of all types at special or free rates, sales or rentals at special prices or rates, lease or rental payments based in whole or in part on the amount of business referred, trips and payment of another person's expenses, or reduction in credit against an existing obligation. The term "payment" is used throughout §§ 3500.14 and 3500.15 as synonymous with the giving or receiving any "thing of value" and does not require transfer of money.

(e) *Agreement or understanding.* An agreement or understanding for the referral of business incident to or part of a settlement service need not be written or verbalized but may be established by a practice, pattern or course of conduct. When a thing of value is received repeatedly and is connected in any way with the volume or value of the business referred, the receipt of the thing of value is evidence that it is made pursuant to an agreement or understanding for the referral of business.

(f) *Referral.* (1) A referral includes any oral or written action directed to a person which has the effect of affirmatively influencing the selection by any person of a provider of a settlement service or business incident to or part of a settlement service when such person will pay for such settlement service or business incident thereto or pay

a charge attributable in whole or in part to such settlement service or business.

(2) A referral also occurs whenever a person paying for a settlement service or business incident thereto is required to use (see § 3500.2, “required use”) a particular provider of a settlement service or business incident thereto.

(g) *Fees, salaries, compensation, or other payments.* (1) Section 8 of RESPA permits:

(i) A payment to an attorney at law for services actually rendered;

(ii) A payment by a title company to its duly appointed agent for services actually performed in the issuance of a policy of title insurance;

(iii) A payment by a lender to its duly appointed agent or contractor for services actually performed in the origination, processing, or funding of a loan;

(iv) A payment to any person of a *bona fide* salary or compensation or other payment for goods or facilities actually furnished or for services actually performed;

(v) A payment pursuant to cooperative brokerage and referral arrangements or agreements between real estate agents and real estate brokers. (The statutory exemption restated in this paragraph refers only to fee divisions within real estate brokerage arrangements when all parties are acting in a real estate brokerage capacity, and has no applicability to any fee arrangements between real estate brokers and mortgage brokers or between mortgage brokers.);

(vi) Normal promotional and educational activities that are not conditioned on the referral of business and that do not involve the defraying of expenses that otherwise would be incurred by persons in a position to refer settlement services or business incident thereto; or

(vii) An employer’s payment to its own employees for any referral activities.

(2) The Department may investigate high prices to see if they are the result of a referral fee or a split of a fee. If the payment of a thing of value bears no reasonable relationship to the market value of the goods or services provided, then the excess is not for services or

goods actually performed or provided. These facts may be used as evidence of a violation of section 8 and may serve as a basis for a RESPA investigation. High prices standing alone are not proof of a RESPA violation. The value of a referral (i.e., the value of any additional business obtained thereby) is not to be taken into account in determining whether the payment exceeds the reasonable value of such goods, facilities or services. The fact that the transfer of the thing of value does not result in an increase in any charge made by the person giving the thing of value is irrelevant in determining whether the act is prohibited.

(3) *Multiple services.* When a person in a position to refer settlement service business, such as an attorney, mortgage lender, real estate broker or agent, or developer or builder, receives a payment for providing additional settlement services as part of a real estate transaction, such payment must be for services that are actual, necessary and distinct from the primary services provided by such person. For example, for an attorney of the buyer or seller to receive compensation as a title agent, the attorney must perform core title agent services (for which liability arises) separate from attorney services, including the evaluation of the title search to determine the insurability of the title, the clearance of underwriting objections, the actual issuance of the policy or policies on behalf of the title insurance company, and, where customary, issuance of the title commitment, and the conducting of the title search and closing.

(h) *Recordkeeping.* Any documents provided pursuant to this section shall be retained for five (5) years from the date of execution.

(i) *Appendix B of this part.* Illustrations in appendix B of this part demonstrate some of the requirements of this section.

[61 FR 13233, Mar. 26, 1996, as amended at 61 FR 29252, June 7, 1996; 61 FR 58476, Nov. 15, 1996]

EFFECTIVE DATE NOTE: At 61 FR 29252, June 7, 1996, § 3500.14 was amended by revising the last sentence of paragraph (b), the heading of paragraph (g), and paragraph (g)(1), effective Oct. 7, 1996. At 61 FR 51782, Oct. 4, 1996, the

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effective date was delayed until further notice. For the convenience of the user, the new text is set forth as follows:

§ 3500.14 Prohibition against kickbacks and unearned fees.

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(b) * * * A business entity (whether or not in an affiliate relationship) may not pay any other business entity or the employees of any other business entity for the referral of settlement service business.

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(g) *Exemptions for fees, salaries, compensation, or other payments.* (1) The following are permissible:

(i) A payment to an attorney at law for services actually rendered;

(ii) A payment by a title company to its duly appointed agent for services actually performed in the issuance of a policy of title insurance;

(iii) A payment by a lender to its duly appointed agent or contractor for services actually performed in the origination, processing, or funding of a loan;

(iv) A payment to any person of a *bona fide* salary or compensation or other payment for goods or facilities actually furnished or for services actually performed;

(v) A payment pursuant to cooperative brokerage and referral arrangements or agreements between real estate agents and real estate brokers. (The statutory exemption restated in this paragraph refers only to fee divisions within real estate brokerage arrangements when all parties are acting in a real estate brokerage capacity, and has no applicability to any fee arrangements between real estate brokers and mortgage brokers or between mortgage brokers.)

(vi) Normal promotional and educational activities that are not conditioned on the referral of business and do not involve the defraying of expenses that otherwise would be incurred by persons in a position to refer settlement services or business incident thereto;

(vii) A payment by an employer to its own *bona fide* employee for generating business for that employer;

(viii) In a controlled business arrangement, a payment by an employer of a bonus to a managerial employee based on criteria relating to performance (such as profitability, capture rate, or other thresholds) of a business entity in the controlled business arrangement. However, the amount of such bonus may not be calculated as a multiple of the number or value of referrals of settlement service business to a business entity in a controlled business arrangement; and

(ix)(A) A payment by an employer to its *bona fide* employee for the referral of settlement service business to a settlement service provider that has an affiliate relationship with the employer or in which the employer has a direct or beneficial ownership interest of more than 1 percent, if the following conditions are met:

(1) The employee does not perform settlement services in any transaction; and

(2) Before the referral, the employee provides to the person being referred a written disclosure in the format of the Controlled Business Arrangement Disclosure Statement, set forth in appendix D to this part.

(B) For purposes of this paragraph (g)(1)(ix), the marketing of a settlement service or product of an affiliated entity, including the collection and conveyance of information or the taking of an application or order for an affiliated entity, does not constitute the performance of a settlement service. Under this paragraph (g)(1)(ix), marketing of a settlement service or product may include incidental communications with the consumer after the application or order, such as providing the consumer with information about the status of an application or order; marketing shall not include serving as the ongoing point of contact for coordinating the delivery and provision of settlement services.

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§ 3500.15 Affiliated business arrangements.

(a) *General.* An affiliated business arrangement is defined in section 3(7) of RESPA (12 U.S.C. 2602(7)).

(b) *Violation and exemption.* An affiliated business arrangement is not a violation of section 8 of RESPA (12 U.S.C. 2607) and of § 3500.14 if the conditions set forth in this section are satisfied. Paragraph (b)(1) of this section shall not apply to the extent it is inconsistent with section 8(c)(4)(A) of RESPA (12 U.S.C. 2607(c)(4)(A)).

(1) The person making each referral has provided to each person whose business is referred a written disclosure, in the format of the Affiliated Business Arrangement Disclosure Statement set forth in appendix D of this part, of the nature of the relationship (explaining the ownership and financial interest) between the provider of settlement services (or business incident thereto) and the person making the referral and of an estimated charge or range of charges generally made by such provider (which describes the